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Clayton County Board of Commissioners



PRESS RELEASE

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Clayton County Fire Chief and Chief of Staff Alex S. Cohilas to retire after 35 years of service

RIVERDALE, GA – Clayton County Fire Chief Alex S. Cohilas will retire on Dec. 24, 2010, from a career that has spanned four decades of public service. Cohilas will simultaneously retire from his chief of staff position with the county.

Cohilas began his career with the Clayton County Fire Department in March 1976. In June 2001, at the age of 45, he was named chief of the department; the youngest chief in the department's history. In 2005, Cohilas was also named director of Clayton County's Emergency Management Agency when the Board of Commissioners merged emergency management under the fire department.

However, his service to the county was not limited to fire and emergency management. In December 2008, Cohilas was also appointed by the Clayton County Board of Commissioners as chief of staff.

"Chief Alex Cohilas has truly served the residents of Clayton County. He has been a team builder and a leader," said Commission Chairman Eldrin Bell. "While serving in his role as chief of staff, Chief Cohilas has assisted me with the day-to-day operations of the county and effectively carried out the policies and procedures put forth by the Board of Commissioners. I will miss both the man and the dedicated public servant."

"One of the main reasons the Board selected Alex to serve as chief of staff is because of his outstanding job performance as the fire chief," said Commission Vice Chairman Wole Ralph. "Alex Cohilas has successfully served in various leadership roles on behalf of the county. Each time the Board has asked him to assist, Chief Cohilas has consistently risen to the occasion and successfully executed his duties. His retirement is a great loss for Clayton County government. However, the Board of Commissioners respects Chief Cohilas' decision and we wish him all the best."

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During his nine-plus years as chief of Clayton County Fire & Emergency Services, Cohilas expanded and upgraded the department's infrastructure – adding three new stations, remodeling two older stations and committing more than \$8 million to upgrade its fleet to one of the newest and most technologically advanced in the state.

He hired more than 100 personnel and established a Leadership Development Program to mentor fire department personnel and prepare them for future mid- and upper-level management positions. He also increased the department's involvement in the community. Annually, the department raises thousands of dollars for various local, state and national charities.

Cohilas also built an organization that has garnered state, national and world-wide acclaim through various awards, publicity and achievements.

Clayton County firefighters were selected Paramedics of the Year in 2008 and 2009, and EMT of the Year in 2009 for the Atlanta region. And, in 2005, Clayton County was selected as the Emergency Medical Services Provider of the Year. As a result of Cohilas' vision and innovation in the delivery of emergency services, special operations and the health and physical fitness of his staff, the department has been featured in national trade journals including Fire Chief Magazine, Fire Engineering Magazine and Fire Rescue Technology. The department has also won an unprecedented seven world titles while competing against thousands of military and civilian firefighters from around the globe at the annual World Firefighter Combat Challenge competition.

Cohilas, who has lived and worked in Clayton County since 1974, expressed his appreciation to his firefighters, the residents of Clayton County and to the county's Board of Commissioners for their support through the years.

"I am proud of our firefighters, EMTs and paramedics. They are simply the best in the world and they will always represent family to me," he said. "It has been an honor to have served my community virtually my entire adult life. My public service career has been extremely rewarding and one that I will always cherish. I am appreciative of the opportunities that I've had through the years and of the support I've received both personally and professionally." County Commissioner Sonna Singleton called Cohilas' service to Clayton County "unmatched."

"The level of service that Chief Cohilas has given to Clayton County over the years is unmatched," Singleton said. "For the past two years, he has utilized his great organizational knowledge and skills for the betterment of Clayton County as chief of staff. He will be missed, however I am fortunate to continue having a relationship with him as a constituent, neighbor and most importantly as a friend."

Chief Staff Attorney Michael Smith, who has worked closely with Cohilas over the years, said he has enjoyed their professional relationship. "Chief Cohilas began his career with Clayton County 35 years ago in public safety, so I know his decision to retire was not an easy one. He has always had the best interest of the county in mind, which is why he accepted the chief of staff position. I have enjoyed working with him in every capacity and his passion for the job will be truly missed."

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